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THE ODES OF HORACE AS FRESHMAN LATIN

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Ne forte credas interitura quae
longe sonantem natus ad Aufidum
non ante volgatas per artis
verba loquor socianda chordis:

sang the Venusian Bard nineteen centuries ago; *ne forte credas*, we repeat, observe the increasingly large number of colleges and universities where the Odes of Horace now form part of the regular requirement for freshmen. The traditional course in Livy and Latin Prose Composition has at last beaten a sullen retreat before *saeva Necessitas*, and, instead of alienating the affections of even staunch young champions of the classics by case-forms and consuls after the stirring scenes and matchless music of the greatest Roman epic, we may now hope to win new recruits from the ranks of the disaffected. Horace has a sure appeal. As for Livy, whatever may be said in his behalf by those who read his "pictured page" in their maturer years, and there is much that can be said, I for one have never yet found a freshman who was not bored alike by the romantic traditions of the days of the kings and by the stirring achievements of Hannibal's dauntless spirit.

Nor are five years of other Latin a necessary prerequisite to an intelligent understanding of the Odes. It is surprising to find students with but two years of High School Latin, and there are, unfortunately, all too many who come to college thus meagrely equipped in these days of utilitarian theories, able both to translate and to appreciate Horace in the second term of their first year at college. They are taken off their guard by the brevity of his poems, surprised into interest by his modern spirit, fired to enthusiasm by catchy epigrams and brilliantly worded truisms

that cling to the memory — and the battle is won. Those pupils need no further argument to convince them that some so-called classics are interesting as well as instructive.

Given the appeal of the subject matter, there still remains the problem of presenting it in the most advantageous manner. How can we best teach Horace to freshmen?

(1) In the first place, it is of course self-evident that the emphasis placed on grammar should be reduced to a minimum. Epexegetical infinitives, accusatives of specification, the middle voice; interlocked and included order; hendiadys, chiasmus, zeugma, oxymoron, litotes, tmesis; pictorial epithets: this much of the structure and style must be thoroughly understood. But there is no need of using the Odes as a drill-book even for these new and important matters; much less for subjunctives and gerunds and ethical datives!

(2) Perhaps the greatest stumbling-block for freshman classes in Horace is presented by the allusions. Geography and history and mythology; islands and heroes and rivers of Hades; Muses and monarchs and mountains, — these are vital to a complete appreciation of the poems, and yet the average student is hopelessly at a loss when confronted by a test-paper made up solely of definite questions on this part of the course.

(3) The matter of prosody is more of a problem. It seems needlessly cruel to inflict upon the innocent freshman the refinements of logaoedic verse with all its confusion of cyclic dactyls and irrational spondees. On the other hand, it is reasonable to expect of a student a bowing acquaintance at least with the most common of the metres of Horace. The desired result can perhaps best be obtained by starting with such stanzas as the Alcmanic Strophe (I, 7 and 28), the First Archilochian (IV, 7) and the Fourth Archilochian Strophe (I, 4), and proceeding from these to the Sapphic and Adonic and the Alcaic. The best way to insure a familiarity with these two most frequently used of the Horatian verse forms is by assigning a complete Ode in each to be memorized in the original — e.g., I, 22 and I, 9. It is

after all through the ear, not the eye, that this kind of knowledge comes. After that the five Asclepiadean metres may be mastered with but little difficulty, so far at least as regards correct reading and the ability to recognize and distinguish these stanzas on the printed page. The other varieties of metre used by Horace are relatively infrequent and may be omitted without great loss. But the memorizing of selected Odes and the constant metrical reading of such as are written in the metres chosen for study is an extremely important part of a course in lyric poetry — even for freshmen.

(4) Ideals in translation differ. But it seems natural to demand a fairly free and polished rendering of the Odes. Facility in translating may be obtained by the occasional requirement of careful written versions to be handed in by the class as a whole after the first difficulties have been explained in the recitation period, and by the daily assignment of the review to some one member of the class who may be excused from reciting on the advance lesson for that particular day in consideration of the extra work involved in preparing an exact and finished translation. The appreciation of the Odes as poetry may often be fostered by encouraging the abler members of the class to attempt metrical versions of favorite poems. The reading of such selected poetical renderings of the work of Horace as may be found in Jourdain's collection — or the translations by Conington, Gladstone and Martin — will often serve as a standard of excellence and an incentive to better work. In this connection attention might be called to the value of such books as "Echoes from the Sabine Farm" by Eugene and Roswell Martin Field; G. M. and G. F. Whicher's "On the Tibur Road;" and Franklin P. Adams' "Tobogganning on Parnassus," in arousing enthusiasm for the Odes.

(5) Last, but by no means least, comes the question of content: What is it all about? Strangely enough, a student may often produce an acceptable translation of a poem and still be unable to discuss intelligently the views therein set forth by the poet. And with freshman classes especially it is quite necessary

to ask repeatedly — at least in the early part of the course — “Understandest thou what thou readest?”¹

And so we find that the most apprehensive forebodings of the kindly, irascible, sun-loving, iron-gray farmer-poet of the Sabine Hills have proved only too true: his writings are indeed being used for the instruction of the young *in extremis vicis*, a not unreasonable fate after all for one whose noblest poems were avowedly written for *virginibus puerisque*.

¹ For a somewhat detailed discussion of the subject matter of the Odes, see *The Classical Weekly*, XVI, 2 (October 9, 1922), pp. 9-13.